

# New Protections for Telephone Consumers

## OUCS Consumer Tips

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**Local telephone service providers in Indiana must now comply with new service quality regulations. The rules provide a number of new protections for residential and small business consumers.**

## Possible bill credits if you face long service outages or long delays in new service connection

92 percent of requests for new local phone service must be completed within five business days.

- ◆ If basic local service is not installed within that five-day period, the customer is to receive a bill credit equal to 20 percent of the installation charge for each of the next five business days without service.
- ◆ After 10 business days, the phone company must provide alternate service (such as a cell phone) free of charge.



92 percent of reported local service outages must be corrected within 24 hours of the report.

- ◆ A customer is to receive a bill credit equal to 33 percent of the recurring monthly service charge if service is not restored within 24 hours.
- ◆ An additional 33 percent credit is to be provided for each additional 24-hour period without service.



Local phone service utilities must provide a customer with a four-hour appointment “window” for service installations or repairs that require the customer to be present.

- ◆ If the company cannot keep the appointment, it must notify the customer by 6:00 p.m. the day before.
- ◆ If the company fails to keep a repair appointment and does not provide the required notification, the company must give the customer a \$50 bill credit.
- ◆ The customer is to receive a \$25 bill credit if the company misses a service installation appointment.

## Specific timeframes for local phone providers to answer consumer calls (during regular business hours)

- ◆ Answering speed for calls to a provider’s repair center or business offices must average 60 seconds or less.
- ◆ Answering speed for calls to directory assistance or local service operators must average 20 seconds or less.
- ◆ Fewer than 10 percent of calls to the above services, on average, should get a busy signal or be disconnected.

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# New disconnection rules can keep you connected to basic service

New regulations will keep more consumers connected to basic local service during sudden and serious financial hardships (to help maintain access to vital services such as public safety, employment, child care, etc.).

Nonpayment of long distance charges or charges for optional services (such as caller ID, call waiting, voice mail, etc.) will result in only the disconnection of those specific services.

Local telephone service can only be disconnected for nonpayment of local phone charges.

If a customer applies for new local telephone service, he or she can only be denied basic local service for failing to pay for past-due local phone charges.

- ◆ If past-due charges for local service are paid, a customer's basic local service will be reconnected. A deposit may be charged as allowed by state rules.
- ◆ If a customer has not paid all outstanding charges for long distance and optional services, he or she may only be reconnected for basic local service, without access to long distance or additional service options.



Previously, failure to pay charges for long distance or optional telephone services could have resulted in denial of new local service requests or complete disconnection of a customer's telephone service.

**All consumers are responsible for paying for their telephone and other utility services on time and in full. The changes in state regulations described above do not excuse any consumers from their basic responsibilities.**

Low-income consumers who have difficulty paying telephone bills may qualify for the federal Lifeline and Link-Up subsidy programs. Consumers can find more information in the OUCC's Utility Service Disconnection and Lifeline/Link-Up publications, available on the agency's Website at [www.IN.gov/OUCC](http://www.IN.gov/OUCC) or by calling the OUCC's consumer services staff toll-free at 1-888-441-2494.



This OUCC consumer fact sheet offers a basic overview and partial summary of new state regulations that took effect in February 2003, after receiving Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission approval. The complete rules are detailed in the Indiana Administrative Code (170 IAC 7-1.2 and 170 IAC 7-1.3) and can be read online at [www.IN.gov/legislative/iac/title170.html](http://www.IN.gov/legislative/iac/title170.html).

The new rules apply only to local telephone service providers, and only to services provided to residential and small business customers with fewer than four access lines. The rules do not apply to cellular phone companies, which operate in a competitive market and are subject to little state regulation. Some of the new rules also do not apply to competitive local exchange carriers that serve fewer than 5,000 customers.

**The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC) is the state agency that represents the interests of all utility consumers and the general public in matters related to the provision of utility services. The agency is active in proceedings before regulatory and legal bodies, and committed to giving consumers a voice in the creation of utility service policy.**